



Understanding Food and Security

Food has many meanings through its preparing and intake for all people. It is essential for survival but also supports a sense of caring, connection and security. What we eat, how it is prepared, who we share it with all create an environment which feeds us physically and emotionally. Both are important for our survival.

From the first nutrition an infant receives upon birth being fed creates a bond between child and mother and sets the stage for a child's physical and emotional growth. If the food received is pleasant to the taste, given with regularity and delivered in a loving context then the child receives both nutritious sustenance and emotional stability. The child's brain determines that his world is secure and predictable leading him to feel loved, safe and content. But if the child receives food which is unpleasant to the taste, is given erratically and without a loving context then the child's brain determines that the world is unpredictable, unsafe and he is unloved. This early food orientated experience sets the stage for the child's future relationship with food, his environment and the people in his world.

Children who experience food deprivation, also known as "food insecurity" develop a life long challenge with food intake and with relationships. This will manifest itself in many different behavioral expressions including over eating and food hoarding. Even when food insecurity is no longer an issue the emotional impact continues to some degree throughout a person's life. Adults caring for children and adults who have experience food insecurity can support their nutritional intake and emotional healing with several actions and interactions:

- Ensure that some types of healthy foods are available at all times. This might include providing the child (or adult) access to their own shelf or container with healthy "Snack" foods they can retrieve at will.
- Provide regular meals and snacks at designated times each day so the person can develop a sense of predictability and security with food availability.
- Allow for adequate food portions, including seconds, as long as they person does not become ill or over obsessive. Seek professional assistance if the person has more extreme reactions.
- Allow children to pack a "Bedside" snack to place by their bed to support food availability during the night.
- Provide small portions of new foods to offer children and adults the opportunity to try different foods thus expanding their food experiences.
- Don't force children or adults to try new foods or eat food they do not prefer as long as the food they do eat offer some basic nutrition. Often preferred food hold an emotional connection to a person, place or experience which is part of the child/adults healing process.
- Create a positive eating/meal experience with a relaxed atmosphere and enjoyable interactions
- Include the child/adult in the food preparation and basic cooking to support their feeling of control over their food and their ability to provide food for themselves.